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ABSTRACT

Attitudinal data were collected on 606 teachers in the fall of 1978 and 426 teachers in the spring of 1979 concerning the prospects of solving, by the year 2000, problems of energy, pollution, hunger, threat of nuclear war, and teacher potential for influencing changes for the better in world conditions. The attitudes of the two groups were compared according to their religious orientation, sex, and age. Respondents were also asked to report their views about perceived changes needed in teacher education programs designed to increase optimism about the future for teachers. Some of the findings reported are: (1) teachers with a religiously oriented belief system were more optimistic about the future than those who were nonreligiously oriented: (2) views of teachers about the future are not related to the factor of sex: and (3) younger teachers are less optimistic about the future than older teachers. Concerning changes in teacher education programs, respondents suggested that courses should: (1) be more humanistic: (2) be more future oriented: and (3) contain more emphasis on the affective domain. Additionally, some respondents noted that teachers should receive training in values clarification, and in developing and maintaining a positive vision of their role in society. (Author/JD)

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TWENTY-YEAR COUNTDOWN: ATTITUDES OF TEACHERS ABOUT THE FUTURE*

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1. Introduction

The purpose of this investigation was to assess the attitudes of public school teachers regarding the prospects of humankind solving by the year 2000 the global problems of energy, pollution of the atmosphere and water; availability of food to feed the population of the world; likelihood of a nuclear world war and human survival; possibility of eliminating the threat of nuclear war through arms control agreements; and their potential for influencing changes for the better in world conditions. Data were gathered on 606 teachers in the fall of 1978 prior to the Iranian political crisis and 426 teachers in the spring of 1979 after the crisis in Iran.

The first sample of teachers was obtained in school districts in North Central Illinois and the second in districts located in South Central Illinois. Both samples were non-random. Subjects were asked to respond to eight items on a Likert-type scale (SD: strongly disagree; D: disagree; A: agree; SA: strongly agree). Responses were assigned weights of 1 to 4 for scoring purposes. Data were also collected on the following three variables: (1) orientation of belief system (religiously oriented or non-religiously oriented), (2) sex, and (3) age categorized two ways - 24 years and younger and 25 years and older. The data were computer analyzed with the use of frequencies and t-test programs in the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS).

The statistical analysis of the quantitative data represented the first component of the investigation. Based on the analysis of the quantitative data

SP 017 367

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which revealed a pessimistic attitude among teachers, a second phase of the investigation was undertaken. The second component of our investigation sought opinions from public school teachers relative to the question of what should be done to attempt to reverse the pessimism in teacher attitudes. The results of this phase of our investigation is in part three of this report.

2. Analysis of the Quantitative Data

Shown in TABLE 1 is the distribution of responses to the eight items on the questionnaire for both the 1978 and 1979 samples. Approximately 60 percent of respondents in the 1979 sample felt that by the year 2000 the energy crisis would be solved, there will be sufficient food to feed the world population, and that they will be able to influence changes for the better in world conditions. Respondents in both samples were evenly divided on whether pollution of the atmosphere problem will be solved. Concerning the water pollution about 55 percent of the respondents in both samples felt that this could be solved by the year 2000. It is clear that confidence about our ability to solve these problems in the remaining two decades in this century is not overwhelming.

Analysis of the data related to nuclear war is revealing with respect to the pessimism in the attitude the public school teachers used in this investigation. Fifty-seven percent and 60 percent of the 1978 and 1979 samples respectively felt that a nuclear war will occur by the year 2000. Additionally, approximately 60 percent of the 1978 sample and 65 percent of the 1979 sample expressed no confidence in arms control agreements as a factor contributing to the elimination of the threat of a nuclear war. Finally, about 37 percent

TABLE 1

DISTRIBUTION OF RESPONSES OF 1978 AND 1979 SAMPLES (SD: STRONGLY DISAGREE; D: DISAGREE; A: AGREE; SA: STRONGLY AGREE)

Items: By the year 2000:	Response	[a] 1978 Sample N	1978 Sample Percent	[a] 1979 Sample N	1979 Sample Percent
1. the energy crisis will be solved.	SD	35	5.8	38	8.9
	D	163	26.9	128	30.1
	A	325	53.6	207	48.7
	SA	83	13.7	52	12.3
	Total	606	100.0	425	100.0
2. the pollution of the atmosphere problem will be solved.	SD	61	10.1	48	11.3
	D	245	40.4	167	39.1
	A	259	42.7	183	43.0
	SA	41	6.8	28	6.6
	Total	606	100.0	426	100.0
3. the pollution of the water problem will be solved.	SD	54	8.9	44	10.3
	D	211	34.8	148	34.7
	A	285	47.1	198	46.5
	SA	56	9.2	36	8.5
	Total	606	100.0	426	100.0
4. there will be enough farm land to produce sufficient food to feed the increasing world population.	SD	59	9.7	47	11.1
	D	188	31.1	126	29.6
	A	257	42.5	193	45.4
	SA	101	16.7	59	13.9
	Total	605	100.0	425	100.0
5. there will be a nuclear war.	SD	44	7.3	30	7.1
	D	213	35.3	139	32.7
	A	273	45.3	193	45.4
	SA	73	12.1	63	14.8
	Total	603	100.0	425	100.0
6. all human life will be destroyed by a nuclear war.	SD	94	15.6	68	16.0
	D	283	47.1	201	47.3
	A	152	25.3	95	22.3
	SA	72	12.0	61	14.4
	Total	601	100.0	425	100.0
7. the threat of nuclear war can be eliminated through arms control agreements.	SD	86	14.3	87	20.5
	D	271	45.2	190	44.7
	A	207	34.5	130	30.6
	SA	36	6.0	18	4.2
	Total	600	100.0	425	100.0
8. I will be able to influence changes for the better in world conditions.	SD	55	9.1	38	9.0
	D	176	29.3	131	31.0
	A	322	53.5	207	48.9
	SA	49	8.1	47	11.1
	Total	602	100.0	423	100.0

[a] Total N's vary due to omitted responses.

of respondents in both samples felt that a nuclear war would destroy all human life. In general the attitudes of the teachers in both samples are remarkably similar. Further, in a global sense, their attitudes about the future as indicated by responses to the eight items in this investigation tends strongly in the direction of pessimism.

Orientation of Belief System and the Future. Presented in TABLE 2 are the comparative responses in the 1978 sample for those persons indicating that they have a belief system which is religiously oriented and those who do not. Similar data are contained in TABLE 3 for the 1979 sample. On five of the eight items for both the 1978 and 1979 samples (items 1--energy; 3--water pollution; 4--adequate world food supply; 6--nuclear war will destroy all human life; and 8--influence changes for the better in world conditions) respondents with a religiously oriented belief system were decidedly more optimistic about the future than the non-religiously oriented groups. Differences in attitude on these five items were statistically significant.

Concerning item 2, solution of pollution of the atmosphere problem, the two groups in the 1978 sample did not differ significantly, while the religiously oriented group in the 1979 sample as compared with the non-religiously oriented group was significantly more optimistic about the future solution of this problem. With respect to item 5, prospects for a nuclear war, religiously oriented respondents in the 1978 sample were significantly more optimistic (nuclear war will not occur) as compared with the non-religiously oriented group. For item 5 there was no significant difference in the attitude of the two groups in the 1979 sample. For item 7, the effectiveness of arms control agreements in eliminating the threat of nuclear war, no difference was found to be present in either the 1978 or 1979 samples based on the orientation of belief system. The performance

TABLE 2

RESPONSES OF 1978 SAMPLE ACCORDING TO ORIENTATION OF BELIEF SYSTEM (GROUP 1: RELIGIOUSLY ORIENTED; GROUP 2: NON-RELIGIOUSLY ORIENTED)

Items: By the year 2000:		N[a]	Mean[b]	SD	t	p
1. the energy crisis will be solved.	Group 1	353	2.33	0.70	2.93	0.004
	Group 2	245	2.64	0.82		
2. the pollution of the atmosphere problem will be solved.	Group 1	353	2.50	0.73	1.58	0.11
	Group 2	245	2.40	0.80		
3. the pollution of the water problem will be solved.	Group 1	351	2.64	0.72	2.86	0.004
	Group 2	245	2.46	0.84		
4. there will be enough farm land to produce sufficient food to feed the increasing world population.	Group 1	352	2.76	0.82	3.19	0.002
	Group 2	245	2.53	0.91		
5. there will be a nuclear war.	Group 1	352	2.54	0.76	3.12	0.002
	Group 2	243	2.74	0.81		
6. all human life will be destroyed by a nuclear war.	Group 1	351	2.22	0.85	3.82	0.001
	Group 2	243	2.49	0.90		
7. the threat of nuclear war can be eliminated through arms control agreements.	Group 1	351	2.34	0.76	0.76	0.45
	Group 2	241	2.29	0.83		
8. I will be able to influence changes for the better in world conditions.	Group 1	351	2.76	0.71	5.85	0.001
	Group 2	243	2.40	0.79		

[a] N's vary due to omitted responses.

[b] Larger the mean the stronger the agreement with the item.

TABLE 3

RESPONSES OF 1979 SAMPLE ACCORDING TO ORIENTATION OF BELIEF SYSTEM
(GROUP 1: RELIGIOUSLY ORIENTED; GROUP 2: NON-RELIGIOUSLY ORIENTED)

Items: By the year 2000:		N[a]	Mean[b]	SD	t	p
1. the energy crisis will be solved.	Group 1	239	2.73	0.79	2.65	0.02
	Group 2	185	2.54	0.81		
2. the pollution of the atmosphere problem will be solved.	Group 1	238	2.51	0.78	1.99	0.05
	Group 2	185	2.36	0.76		
3. the pollution of the water problem will be solved.	Group 1	238	2.60	0.79	2.00	0.05
	Group 2	185	2.44	0.77		
4. there will be enough farm land to produce sufficient food to feed the increasing world population.	Group 1	238	2.71	0.85	2.34	0.02
	Group 2	184	2.51	0.85		
5. there will be a nuclear war.	Group 1	238	2.64	0.82	1.28	0.20
	Group 2	185	2.74	0.80		
6. all human life will be destroyed by a nuclear war.	Group 1	237	2.33	0.86	3.11	0.002
	Group 2	185	2.51	0.96		
7. the threat of nuclear war can be eliminated through arms control agreements.	Group 1	238	2.20	0.75	0.09	0.93
	Group 2	184	2.20	0.87		
8. I will be able to influence changes for the better in world conditions.	Group 1	238	2.81	0.68	5.44	0.001
	Group 2	182	2.39	0.87		

[a] N's vary due to omitted responses.

[b] Larger the mean the stronger the agreement with the item.

of both groups (religiously oriented and non-religiously oriented) in the 1978 and 1979 samples, while statistically non-significant, tended to indicate a lack of confidence in arms control agreements as a vehicle for averting a nuclear war. In summary, respondents as a group with a religiously oriented belief system demonstrated more optimism about the future as related to the eight issues in this investigation than those without a religious orientation.

Relationship of Sex to Attitudes About the Future. No significant sex differences were found to exist in attitudes concerning pollution of the atmosphere (item 2), adequate world food supply (item 4), threat of nuclear war (item 5), and ability of one to influence changes for better in the world (item 8) for either the 1978 or 1979 samples as indicated in TABLE 4 and TABLE 5. With respect to the problem of energy (item 1) and water pollution (item 3), there was no sex difference in attitudes in the 1978 sample, but in the 1979 sample males were significantly more optimistic about the future solution of these two problems than females. Concerning arms control agreements as a deterrent to nuclear war (item 7), females were significantly more optimistic than males in the 1978 sample while no sex difference in attitude on item 7 was found in the 1979 sample. Thus, with three exceptions, attitudes about the future are not sex-related with reference to the eight issues used in this investigation.

Age and Attitudes About the Future. The ages of the respondents were classified two ways: 24 years and younger, and 25 years and older. This arbitrary grouping was designed to insure the identification of a group recently out of college and thus clearly younger as compared with the older group. Data according to age for the 1978 and 1979 samples are shown in

TABLE 4

RESPONSES OF 1978 SAMPLE ACCORDING TO SEX

Items: By the year 2000:		N[a]	Mean[b]	SD	t	p
1. the energy crisis will be solved.	Female	357	2.71	0.72	1.63	0.10
	Male	243	2.81	0.82		
2. the pollution of the atmosphere problem will be solved.	Female	357	2.46	0.72	0.13	0.90
	Male	243	2.46	0.84		
3. the pollution of the water problem will be solved.	Female	357	2.55	0.74	0.48	0.63
	Male	243	2.58	0.84		
4. there will be enough farm land to produce sufficient food to feed the increasing world population.	Female	356	2.71	0.81	1.44	0.15
	Male	243	2.60	0.96		
5. there will be a nuclear war.	Female	355	2.61	0.77	0.44	0.66
	Male	242	2.64	0.82		
6. all human life will be destroyed by a nuclear war.	Female	352	2.34	0.86	0.26	0.79
	Male	242	2.32	0.91		
7. the threat of nuclear war can be eliminated through arms control agreements.	Female	353	2.38	0.76	2.00	0.05
	Male	241	2.24	0.83		
8. I will be able to influence changes for the better in world conditions.	Female	354	2.66	0.72	1.89	0.06
	Male	242	2.54	0.82		

[a] N's vary due to omitted responses.

[b] Larger the mean the stronger the agreement with the item.

TABLE 5

RESPONSES OF 1979 SAMPLE ACCORDING TO SEX

Items: By the year 2000:		N[a]	Mean[b]	SD	t	p
1. the energy crisis will be solved.	Female	256	2.56	0.78	2.49	0.01
	Male	168	2.76	0.84		
2. the pollution of the atmosphere problem will be solved.	Female	257	2.42	0.78	0.83	0.41
	Male	168	2.49	0.78		
3. the pollution of the water problem will be solved.	Female	257	2.47	0.78	2.02	0.04
	Male	168	2.62	0.81		
4. there will be enough farm land to produce sufficient food to feed the increasing world population.	Female	256	2.62	0.81	0.05	0.96
	Male	168	2.63	0.93		
5. there will be a nuclear war.	Female	256	2.71	0.80	0.87	0.38
	Male	168	2.64	0.82		
6. all human life will be destroyed by a nuclear war.	Female	256	2.39	0.89	1.09	0.28
	Male	168	2.29	0.95		
7. the threat of nuclear war can be eliminated through arms control agreements.	Female	256	2.21	0.76	0.90	0.37
	Male	168	2.14	0.88		
8. I will be able to influence changes for the better in world conditions.	Female	255	2.67	0.78	1.63	0.10
	Male	167	2.54	0.82		

[a] N's vary due to omitted responses.

[b] Larger the mean the stronger the agreement with the item.

TABLE 6 and TABLE 7, respectively. Teachers 25 years of age and older, as compared with those 24 years of age and younger, were significantly more optimistic about the future solution of the problems of energy (item 1), pollution of the atmosphere (item 2), water pollution (item 3), adequate world food supply (item 4), and the question of whether a nuclear war would destroy all human life (item 6). This outcome of the data analysis was true of both the 1978 and the 1979 samples. Concerning the likelihood of a nuclear war (item 5) there was no age difference in attitude in the 1978 sample. For the 1979 sample, however, the 25 years and older group was significantly more optimistic about the likelihood of averting a nuclear war.

Concerning the question of the efficacy of arms control agreements as a means of eliminating nuclear war, no significant difference was observed between the two age groups in either the 1978 or 1979 samples. Finally, with reference to the question of whether one can influence change for better in world conditions, no significant difference in attitude was found between the two age groups in either the 1978 or the 1979 samples. Clearly age is somewhat related to attitudes about the future. Older teachers tended to be more optimistic than younger teachers.

Summary of Results of Analysis of the Quantitative Data. From the analysis of the quantitative data dealing with teacher attitudes about the future as related to the eight problems on which this investigation focused, the following conclusions seem warranted: (1) A religiously oriented belief system and world view is a strong factor in an optimistic view of the future; (2) A teacher's view of the future, whether it be pessimistic or optimistic, is independent of sex classification; (3) Young teachers as a group appear to be less optimistic about the future than older teachers.

TABLE 6

RESPONSES OF 1978 SAMPLE ACCORDING TO AGE (GROUP 1: 24 YEARS AND YOUNGER; GROUP 2: 25 YEARS AND OLDER)

Items: By the year 2000:		N[a]	Mean[b]	SD	t	p
1. the energy crisis will be solved.	Group 1	200	2.62	0.75	3.22	0.001
	Group 2	400	2.82	0.75		
2. the pollution of the atmosphere problem will be solved.	Group 1	200	2.82	0.72	5.77	0.001
	Group 2	400	2.59	0.76		
3. the pollution of the water problem will be solved.	Group 1	200	2.37	0.77	4.41	0.001
	Group 2	400	2.66	0.76		
4. there will be enough farm land to produce sufficient food to feed the increasing world population.	Group 1	200	2.56	0.86	2.12	0.04
	Group 2	399	2.71	0.87		
5. there will be a nuclear war.	Group 1	198	2.68	0.79	1.28	0.20
	Group 2	399	2.59	0.79		
6. all human life will be destroyed by a nuclear war.	Group 1	199	2.52	0.87	3.75	0.001
	Group 2	396	2.23	0.88		
7. the threat of nuclear war can be eliminated through arms control agreements.	Group 1	197	2.33	0.79	0.18	0.86
	Group 2	397	2.32	0.80		
8. I will be able to influence changes for the better in world conditions.	Group 1	199	2.56	0.76	1.09	0.28
	Group 2	397	2.63	0.76		

[a] N's vary due to omitted responses.

[b] Larger the mean the stronger the agreement with the item.

TABLE 7

RESPONSES OF 1979 SAMPLE ACCORDING TO AGE (GROUP 1: 24 YEARS AND YOUNGER; GROUP 2: 25 YEARS AND OLDER)

Items: By the year 2000:		N[a]	Mean[b]	SD	t	p
1. the energy crisis will be solved.	Group 1	124	2.51	0.77	2.19	0.03
	Group 2	297	2.70	0.82		
2. the pollution of the atmosphere problem will be solved.	Group 1	125	2.22	0.79	3.92	0.001
	Group 2	297	2.54	0.75		
3. the pollution of the water problem will be solved.	Group 1	125	2.37	0.79	2.86	0.004
	Group 2	297	2.61	0.78		
4. there will be enough farm land to produce sufficient food to feed the increasing world population.	Group 1	125	2.38	0.86	3.79	0.001
	Group 2	296	2.73	0.84		
5. there will be a nuclear war.	Group 1	124	2.94	0.82	4.30	0.001
	Group 2	297	2.58	0.78		
6. all human life will be destroyed by a nuclear war.	Group 1	125	2.68	0.97	4.93	0.001
	Group 2	296	2.22	0.85		
7. the threat of nuclear war can be eliminated through arms control agreements.	Group 1	125	2.26	0.92	1.34	0.18
	Group 2	296	2.15	0.75		
8. I will be able to influence changes for the better in world conditions.	Group 1	125	2.51	0.85	1.74	0.08
	Group 2	294	2.66	0.78		

[a] N's vary due to omitted responses.

[b] Larger the mean the stronger the agreement with the item.

3. Views of Teachers About Changes in Teacher Education

Based on the evidence of pessimism among public school teachers, we decided to ascertain the views of teachers about their ideas for overcoming this problem. Accordingly, fifty-seven public school teachers were asked to respond to a questionnaire consisting of the following open-ended question: What suggestions or ideas do you have for changes in teacher education (courses, strategies, methodologies, pre-service and in-service training, etc.) which might, in your opinion, reverse the present trend of pessimism among public school teachers about the future?

An examination of the responses revealed that they fell into a two-fold classification. The first is that of courses. Respondents suggested that courses employed in the preparation of teachers should: be more humanistic and future-oriented; place current problems in historical perspective; place more emphasis on the affective domain; and stress the philosophy and history of education. Several respondents stated that courses with a religious orientation should be instituted since religion has always pointed toward a hopeful future.

The second category of responses deals with strategies and methodologies. Typical suggestions were: teaching of basics must include the teaching of values; provide more workshops and training in the area of value clarification, and problem solving strategies; develop strategies for aiding teachers in dealing with feelings of pessimism, maintaining a positive vision of their role in society, and identifying areas in which they can become forces for constructive change. Additionally, several respondents noted that standards related to

futuristic value orientation should be used in screening applicants for admission to teacher-education programs and for employment.

4. Summary

In planning and executing this study we had uppermost in our thinking that the values of teachers impact on the value-acquisition of students. Values held by teachers represent a "hidden curriculum." Successive generations of students who acquire pessimistic views about the future via the influence of teachers can have the cumulative effect of producing undesirable futures since the way people think determines many of their actions.

Our finding that teachers with a religious orientation were more optimistic about the future than those without this perspective was not a surprise when it is considered that religion, particularly Christianity, generally looks forward to a "brighter tomorrow." In this context a tantalizing question occurred to us: if it is desirable that teachers and students have a positive and optimistic view about the future, is parochial/church-supported education better prepared to accomplish this objective than public school education? We are of the opinion that the study of the attitudes of teachers about the future is a worthwhile area of focus and should be encouraged.